

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part one

Teaching #1798 - Sunday, April 12th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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GOD'S HARD-TO-BELIEVE PLAN FOR MAKING YOUR LIFE PERFECT

James 1:1-4 - "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. [2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

James never uses his last name in his letter. Most scholars feel the author is *James, the brother of Jesus*, sometimes called *James the "Just."* Circumstances seem to rule out the other two James mentioned in the New Testament. *James the Son of Zebedee* (the brother of John) was executed by Herod Agrippa around 41 A.D., probably before the letter of James was written. *James the Son of Alphaeus* is almost totally unknown in terms of New Testament detail. That, in itself, doesn't discount him, except it is unlikely that such an obscure individual could send a letter to Christians of the Dispersion without even identifying himself with his last name.

The interesting thing about James, the brother of Jesus, is he *wasn't even a believer during Jesus' lifetime:*

John 7:2-5 - "Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. [3] So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. [4] For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." [5] For not even his brothers believed in him."

From what we gather, James was converted after Jesus' resurrection. He didn't *want* to believe Jesus' message just because they were brothers. He was *hard to convince*. Only the compelling evidence of the resurrection of Jesus changed his mind and heart. He remained in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen. And his influence and authority in the young church is evidenced by the fact that he is the one who approved Paul's apostolic ministry (**Galatians 1:19**). James also presided over the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (**Acts 15**). He became the leader of the large home base church in that city.

It could easily be argued that James was the most influential Christian leader of his day. In fact, he was well enough known that he could simply identify himself as "James" (**vs.1**). Everybody knew who he was. Even his absence of official title tells us something important and leads us into the very first lesson of the book:

1) **THE ONLY TITLE THAT MATTERED TO JAMES REVEALS HIS PRACTICAL DEVOTION TO JESUS CHRIST**

James 1:1 - "**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**"

James brings a magnificent sense of *Christian identity and calling* with his very first sentence. He was well enough known to have many titles at his disposal - Apostle, Pastor, Leader, Elder. And there's nothing wrong with any of those titles. The New Testament is full of their use. But James' title of choice - his *brand* - is not so much a *title* as a *reminder*. James is first and foremost a *"servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...."*

It is striking James *only mentions Jesus twice in his whole letter*. He mentions Jesus in chapter one, verse one, and in chapter two, verse two. And both times he uses the same title, *"the Lord Jesus Christ"*.

Stop and think about that. James is Jesus' brother (half-brother, technically). They were of the same earthly family. My family never calls me Reverend Don Horban, or Pastor Don (well, once in a while, when I'm being mocked, Pastor Don). They know that is just a *title* and they don't have to use it. James seems to know that it is more than a matter of religious propriety to call Jesus Lord. It's not just a title. It's a *reality that describes the way James lives in relation to Jesus*.

James means for us to get a picture of his life. You can't understand James' life except as a *servant*. His choices and actions and ambitions will seem impractical and ridiculous except they're interpreted as the plan and will of his Master rather than himself - like you couldn't make sense of the decisions of the ambassador of a foreign country except you know something about the government and nation he represents.

Nothing matters more to potent spiritual life than making sure widely used words aren't allowed to leak their meaning with constant use. *"Lord"* is a two-way term. It doesn't just describe the person with the title. It describes the relationship the

person **calling** someone else Lord has to the one **bearing** the title. In other words, **Lordship** doesn't just refer to **one** side of the relationship. It describes **both** sides.

Calling Jesus the "**Lord Jesus Christ**" also defines James' role. **If Jesus is the Lord, then James is the servant.** It can't logically be otherwise. It's always refreshing to meet people who live and eat and breathe and serve under the Lordship of Jesus. James feels the most important thing he can say about himself is **he's a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

We need this reminder today. There's frequently much more talk about what Jesus does for **us** than what we do for **Him.** He's the Lord. We're the servants. I don't doubt you **love** Jesus. Arguably, today's whole worship renewal is all about expressing our love to Father God through His Son Jesus Christ, in the life and power of the Holy Spirit. But the ultimate issue of the **Lordship** of Jesus isn't telling Him you love Him. Do that, for sure. But ask yourself in what specific sense you are **servicing** your Lord Jesus Christ.

2) JAMES WRITES TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE MEANING OF PERSONAL STRUGGLE

James 1:1 - "**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**"

Notice, "**...to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion....**" These people were not on holidays, nor were they relaxing or sight-seeing. They've been forcibly scattered - **dispersed** - running for their lives, leaving their family, friends, material goods, and earthly security all behind. Because of intense persecution they've been **forced to leave Palestine** against their wills.

They could have stayed in total comfort, but for that they would have had to deny the "**Lord Jesus Christ.**" And again, because Jesus was **Lord**, their ultimate loyalty couldn't budge or shift, no matter what the cost. They're on the run because they're being called upon to prove by testing the actual **lordship of Christ** over their lives. You only **know** who's Lord when you are called to **pay some price.** Then the real title-deed of your life manifests itself.

So right away the book of James touches down on a runway close to home. He doesn't start, as does John, rhapsodizing about the pre-incarnate Word. He doesn't fill our minds, as the synoptic gospels do, with the history of the birth of the Babe in the manger. I dare say James is much closer to your life's address this morning - "**To people who are being beaten up by life....**" Right away, we all want to open up God's letter on this subject. Except when we **do**, we find a surprising slap in the face:

3) THE CALL TO REJOICE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TRIAL

James 1:2 - "**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds....**"

I know James is dealing specifically with religious persecution in this passage. And I know most of us still don't have much experience of such. Our primary danger is so far is **seduction**, not **persecution.** But the text does justify opening up the envelop a little bit because James says he's talking about encountering "**trials of various kinds.**"

James writes as a pastor who is concerned that these Christians **continue to move on into maturity even in the middle of the hardships they are facing.** He doesn't want them to be beaten, side-tracked, or to stumble in any way.

Here's the thrust of these next few verses. If these dear saints are going to continue on to maturity they will have to maintain a distinctly Christian attitude to potential stumbling blocks. Notice, it's a **command** addressed to the **mind and will** - "**count it all joy.**"

"Count," or **"reckon."** Those are almost mathematical terms. He's talking about how these people **figure** they're way through their situation. That alone tells us much about what he means. He's not talking about something God is going to do **for** them. He's not even talking about something God is going to do **in** them - at least not initially. He's talking about something **they** will have to do. This is not a **feeling** that's going to simply rise up in these Christians. Feelings aren't always subject to our wills. James doesn't mean Christians giggle about the difficulties of life.

This is so clearly presented in **1 Peter 1:6** - "**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials....**"

These people are genuinely **"grieved,"** says Peter. And Peter, like James, puts two things together that don't seem to mix. He's not talking about rejoicing and trials in **sequence**, as though first you rejoice, then trials come and you have to suffer. He's talking about rejoicing and being grieved by trials **at the same time - not one after the other, or one replacing the other.**

He means both the trial and the joy must be held together. And, what's more, Peter actually says this process isn't **random** in our lives, but is **necessary** - **"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,**

What do those two words - **"if necessary"** - mean? Necessary for **what?** Necessary to **whom?** That's the next point James is going to unpack:

4) **STEADFASTNESS COMES FROM KNOWING GOD'S PURPOSE IN YOUR TRIAL**

James 1:3 - **"...for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."**

Underline those words, **"for you know."** James tells us something very important about these trials which Peter says are so **"necessary."** Trials don't do anything good in my life **automatically.** You and I have both seen people just grow sour and bitter and discouraged through the trials of life. That seems to be the default process of self-ruled people.

James calls us to **know** something - **"...for you know...."** He says, "I'm calling you to constantly hold something in your mind! Don't just let thoughts **happen.** And you must hold this truth in your mind quite firmly because the trials that come tend to shake and knock this truth loose."

You must focus on the **result** of the trials while you're still **in** the trials. You must see them less and less as **isolated events** and more and more as a **process leading to a result.** You must look at trials as part of the process like the **flame tempering the steel.**

Here's the teaching. **"Trials of various kinds" (2)** will come. That word **"trials"** is an inclusive word referring to both **external pain and persecution** and also the **internal temptation to sin and compromise** that can result from those situations. And, in **all** of those situations, my **success** in facing the things that come my way in life, and the **fruit** of all those unavoidable trials, **depends on the set of my will and mind.**

Pick the last time you fell badly into sin and failure. Ask yourself how different the result might have been if, in the temptation, you had a strong sense that God wanted to use that very situation to give you more strength and maturity than you had ever experienced in your walk with Him before - that here was a chance, as James says, to move ahead into **"steadfastness"** and **"completeness"** and **"perfection."**

How prone we are to look at all the temptations and trials of life as occasions for **falling** and **failing** rather than occasions for **perfecting** and **rising** to new levels with Christ Jesus. We program ourselves for disaster simply by not **"knowing"** what James says we need to know.

5) **ALWAYS LET GOD'S PLAN HAVE ITS FULL EFFECT IN YOUR LIFE**

James 1:4 - **"And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

When you take medication, the doctor usually tells you to use up the full prescription, even if you start to feel better before it's finished. He's telling you to allow the medicine to have its **full effect** in your body.

This is the thinking of James in this wonderful text. Apparently there are **different choices** we can all make when facing trials. We **don't** get to choose what trials come, or when. But we **do** choose whether or not we will let God have His way in our lives through them. **"And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (4).**

Let me show you a text that, on the surface, **seems** to be a flat-out contradiction to our text in James. Jesus spoke clearly

about people who experienced trials and persecution - **exactly** the kind of stuff about which James is writing to these scattered Christians:

Matthew 13:20 - 21 - "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."

Jesus and James are talking about the same thing. Apparently there are options. The **options are maturing or withering**. Jesus describes people who are **rootless** when trials come. James describes people who **remember** something when trials come. Jesus talks about people who **wither** and James talks about people who are **perfected**. The difference **isn't** in the trials. The difference is in the **understanding**.

Remember, if you forget the **goal** you will **wither** when the trial comes. The goal - **God's goal** - is, according to James, to make you **"perfect, and complete, lacking in nothing"**(4). If I told you God could make you **perfect** you might not even believe it. And if I told you God's **tool** for doing this was **trials** you probably wouldn't even **want** it. But God **does** want it. He wants perfection in our lives more than He wants **comfort** in our lives. He wants perfection in our lives more than He wants **wealth** in our lives. He wants perfection in our lives even more than He wants **health** in our lives.

So, says James, He uses **trials**. Why trials? Why can't God find something more pleasant to use in the perfecting of my life? Let me read some very precious, old words from a great Anglican preacher, **Henry Melvill**, who was chaplain to the Queen in London. He wrote something profound on the perfecting work of trials in St Paul's Cathedral on a Tuesday morning in 1853. These words, all by themselves, are worth the effort you took to get up this morning, shower, get dressed and make the drive to church. This is a rather lengthy quote. So stay with it and think about these words prayerfully:

"There cannot be needed a proof that it is both the design and tendency of affliction to cause us, as it were with regard to the present world, to feel that this is not our home, and that we should fix our affections on things which are invisible, but enduring. It will always be intensely difficult to persuade an irreligious man that the visible is not to be compared to the invisible, just because he has not the faculties to enable him to appreciate the one, wherever the others have acquired for him any real or ascertainable existence."

"And here it is that affliction and trial comes in with a sort of compensating power, for by stamping 'vanity' on all created good, proving by how slight a tenure we hold what we most prize; and by reminding us that when we must be taken from it - affliction is fitted for the doing much towards destroying that superiority which attaches to temporal things, for showing them in their true light, notwithstanding they have gained for us a value, because addressing themselves so directly to the affections; So long as a man remains in the undisturbed possession of wealth, and of whatever wealth commands, there will seem little force in the reasoning which tells him that there are better treasures which he should seek, compared with which what he has are utterly worthless and unsatisfying."

"But let wealth take to itself wings; or let sickness incapacitate him for the enjoyment of what it can procure, and he will have had some palpable demonstration, that earthly treasure, after all, is not sufficient for our necessities; and, therefore, ought he to be, even if he be not in the more favourable position to apprehend the worth on unseen things, when wealth was made to flee away like a shadow, about to discern their real substance. We take this ground - that it is the tendency of affliction to dislodge the affections from temporal things, and lead them towards eternal."

James takes the same concept as does Melvill, but tightens it up and capsulises the same truth in fewer words. James says God uses trials to perfect my life because trials are the only tool that show what's **lacking** in my life - **"....that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"**(4).

In other words, without trials there is nothing to distinguish between what I **know** and how I **live**. I think I'm **patient**. But that's just because I've had nothing to make me impatient recently. I think I'm **forgiving**. But that's only because nobody has hurt me really badly and cruelly recently. I think I'm willing to **sacrifice everything to follow Jesus with joy**. But that's only because no really great sacrifices have been **required** of me yet.

Then the trial comes. And, if I'm honest, my response to that trial shows me things the holes way down in the bottom of my heart where spiritual life is quietly leaking away. That's how trials perfect my life. They show me what's **leading** - what's **lacking**, to use James' word. They confront me with the truth about myself - if I'm honest and patient enough to face it. God

can start a much deeper work than was possible before the trial revealed what was **lacking** - showing me what were **big holes** in my unexamined, untried soul.

But remember, there's a **time** element here. I don't go **into** the trial complete. I **emerge** from it complete. This marvellous goal of full orbbed steadfastness and perfection and completeness in Jesus isn't snapped up in a grab bag. It won't come to people who don't have the faith and persistence to let God have the time to cut deeply into life.

Hear the passionate plea of James today, "**Let God perfect your life! And let Him use His own tools!**" The goal is brighter than you can experience in the heat of the trial. Don't quit. Don't fly off the handle. Give God the time to ripen something great in your soul.